Quarterly

MUSEUM PATRONS' ASSOCIATION of
the LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

VOL. 2 - NO. 1 JANUARY, 1942

LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM

Quarterly

Published by the Museum Patrons'
Association of the Los Angeles
County Museum

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JANUARY 1942
VOL. 2, NO. 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Chinese Furniture 7
Gregor Norman-Wilcox

Three Panels by Jan van Goyen 11
Louise Ballard

Rancho La Brea Birds 17
Hildegarde Howard

Schedule of Exhibitions 21

From the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kullgren

"EARLY CHINESE FURNITURE"

Before the Chinese artist actually began to draw a painting, he suffered a long period of quiet, thoughtful contemplation. The painting which finally resulted was then a deeply-understood report of his subject, according to the almost-mystic impressions he had received. So, too, with the fine calligrapher (that most reputable of Chinese artists), whose brush strokes might follow an exquisite tradition as to the precise shape and direction of every detail, yet be informed with the painter's sensitive, individualistic feeling about each character he drew. Formal patterns of sophistication were well established in the various Chinese arts many centuries before Columbus discovered America, but always expressed with this marvelous introspection and sincerity on the part of the artist. It may seem far-fetched to claim such esoteric qualities in the case of mere wooden furniture. But one has only to study seriously the finesse and balance of any fine, early piece to suspect that the craftsman has beautifully considered every detail. Because his piece is so simple and restrained, all pains have been spent on matters of proportion, the exact placing of subtle decorations, and the quietly satisfying effect of the whole design as being planned for a given purpose.

For those of us to whom, as westerners, the furniture of Queen Anne or Chippendale or Hepplewhite may represent the "last word" in design, it should be a shock and an humiliation to encounter superior examples of work done by the Chinese several centuries earlier! Our own efforts appear so amateur, by comparison. Surely the "Chinese Chippendale" style of the 1760's is a shameful burlesque of its reputed design-source, however truly it may be a serious and outstanding achievement of our own Golden Age of cabinetmaking.

History records, about every thirty years, a cycle of enthusiasm for the Chinese theme. We recall the 1680 silverwork with Chinese-subject engraving, the Queen Anne

From the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kullgren

lacquers of the 1710-20's, the Chinese Chippendale manner of the 1760's, or the romantic chinoiserie of France in the Marie Antoinette period. During the era of our clipper ships, we were much inspired by importations from the strange land of China. Our archives are full of evidence following what the Chinese would call the "barbaric Western" interpretation of eastern ideas.

This implies no snobbish disdain for the great talent of the Brothers Adam, who evolved the neo-classic style in the 18th century as an invention based on the excavations at Herculaneum and Pompeii; or for Thomas Chippendale's novel renderings of the French taste, or for any other significant epoch in western work. It only suggests that we fail to approach the skills of China herself. Europe was proud of reproducing at last (1723) the true-porcelains for which the secret had been so long sought. Europe founded a particular craft of lacquer-workers, led by oriental example and especially

From the collection of Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kullgren

successful in France. Europe produced a fine chiseled gilt-bronze as mountings, for instance, for its Sevres porcelains,—and all these doings were an experiment admittedly centuries behind the actual experience of the Chinese.

Little less wonderful than its qualities of design, is the ingenuity of very craftsmanship in the old Chinese furniture. We of the occident take no small pride in the careful dovetailing of a drawer, or fitting of an inlay—as if such things were not the least, and expectable, of workmanly performances! We little aspire to that degree of perfection in complicated joinery which is almost a commonplace in early Chinese pieces. Sections of their portable, "knock-down" furniture are assembled with hidden, cleverly fitted sliding wedges that lock together; doors and screens of intricate fretwork are so nicely mitred and joined that they hold firm for four centuries without the use of glue or nails; the panel of a chair-back is shaped in a deeply double-curving profile that the western

workman would say was nearly impossible to render in wood. The Chinese cabinetmaker was truly an artist, in the understanding of his material and the respectful fashion of his work.

Perhaps, indeed, it was the Chinese who schooled Europe not only in matters of design and craftsmanship, but in the very reverence for the wood itself. Looking back to our Gothic and Tudor pieces, with their coarse detail and oftentimes crude construction, we are reminded that not until the days of trade with China did we begin to employ fine veneers, or matched panels of figured wood in doors or drawer fronts, or to use the plain cabriole leg of simple grace instead of other forms tortured with bold carving. It can be shown, in fact, that many of our special "inventions" of design (such as the 18th century ball-and-claw foot) were borrowed directly from earlier Chinese sources.

It should be a revelation, then, to inspect the Kullgren Collection of 16th-17th century Chinese furniture at the Museum,—in the woods *chi tze mu, nan mu, tze t'an, huang hua li* or others, some of which were reserved for the use of the Emperor or the mandarins or other higher classes. To western minds, the mention of Chinese furniture is too often synonymous with coarsely "hand carved teakwood" or those blackwood pieces inlaid with simple designs in mother-of-pearl. It might then be surprising to discover the Kullgren examples of earlier, fine work!

Especially notable is the pair of cabinets (of *chi tze mu*) for the display of porcelains, with their uppers worked in delicately mitred open fretwork. Or there is a wonderfully simple artist's-table of *huang hua li,* or the pair of low cabinets in the same wood, with handsomely plain brasses. Or the pair of round-backed armchairs, or a set of eight chairs with tapered backs, such as they are respectfully reproducing nowadays. Or the remarkable mandarin table-desk and wall-cabinet, which may be taken apart and packed in their own bases, for convenience in the travels of the mandarin within his precinct. All these things were found in, or near Peking.

To our knowledge, no western museum has ever shown a collection of these early-type pieces *per se* until now. Their exhibition here should thus be of great information and pleasure to those who delight in purity of design or extreme niceties of craftsmanship.

GREGOR NORMAN-WILCOX

THREE PANELS by JAN VAN GOYEN

No matter how magnificent the array of temporary exhibitions, nor how carefully one memorizes paintings during their too short periods of display, one misses the privilege of returning again and again to a painting for study. Every few weeks finds the staff and visitors of the museum parting with pictures for which they have formed strong attachments but which must be sent on to other points of an exhibition tour or returned to private collections. It is, therefore, an event of importance when paintings of excellent quality are lent to the Museum for a long period.

Among the best-loved of the Masterpieces of Art, shown here in the summer of 1940, were the placid Dutch landscapes. So that it is with certainty of public interest that the Museum announces that among the paintings lent to the Museum by the estate of Anita M. Baldwin, (daughter of "Lucky" Baldwin), are three panels by Jan van Goyen, Dutch landscape painter.

The Dutch painters have a gift for depicting their native land impersonally. Their landscapes are calm and neat. The monotonousness of the flat land is relieved by the movement and majesty of the cloud effects and the small activities of the people who swarm over the fields and the rivers but who are secondary in importance to the landscape itself.

Van Goyen's work is typical of the seventeenth century Dutch landscape school, and yet has strongly individual characteristics. His early, gay landscapes, full of local color, change after 1630 to his mature style, simpler in composition, soberer in color. In fact, many of his paintings are almost monochromatic, resembling studies in *grisaille*. The dominant colors are pale green blues and greys, warm browns and the light green verging into yellow-brown which is peculiar to Van Goyen and his

SEASCAPE by JAN VAN GOYEN

Oil on wood panel, 22½″ wide x 16″ high. Signature on boat in foreground: "VG 1640". Lent by the Anita M. Baldwin Estate.

followers. As he grows older, the cloud-hung skies take up more and more space in the pictures until they often fill as much as four-fifths of the whole surface of the painting.

This land which is almost more water than land, in which the moisture-laden air seems to mingle with the rivers and the sea, is the subject of these three panels. In the *Seascape* the moving clouds are touched with a rosy glow which is reflected in the water and on the churches, towers, and windmills of the town on the far shore. In the foreground the vigorously-painted figures and boats are dark accents that strengthen the delicate harmony of the rest of the picture.

The *River Scene* shows the same kinship of water and sky. The light, filtered through the clouds, fluctuates on the river, and the skimming birds add to the impression of movement and the luminosity of the sky. The cluster of boats and fishermen with their nets and huge, round baskets form a solid mass that is full of subtle variations of color.

The third panel has the same simplicity of compositional scheme. Van Goyen plays the same theme over and over again, but with such observation of nature and such vitality in his painting that the results are never tiresome.

The biographical information about Jan van Goyen is rather scanty. We know that he was born in Leyden on January 13, 1596, and that he died at the Hague on April 27, 1656. He was sent off at the age of ten for his first art lessons and studied fitfully with Coenraed Schilperood, Isack Nicolai van Swanenburch, and Jan Arentsz de Man. His father seems to have wished to make the lad a glass painter, but when Jan showed no liking for glass painting and wished to paint pictures, he was allowed to go to Hoorn for study with Willem Gerritsz. Jan was probably at Hoorn during the years 1608-10. He then returned to Leyden where he stayed until he was nineteen or twenty when he set out for a year's travel, spending much time wandering through France. He then studied a year in Haarlem under Esaias van de Velde, the man who had the most perceptible influence on his work.

From various sources we can piece together some facts about his later life. His pictures themselves are evidence that he traveled a great deal. His numerous views, made at different periods in his career, of towns and villages on the principal Dutch

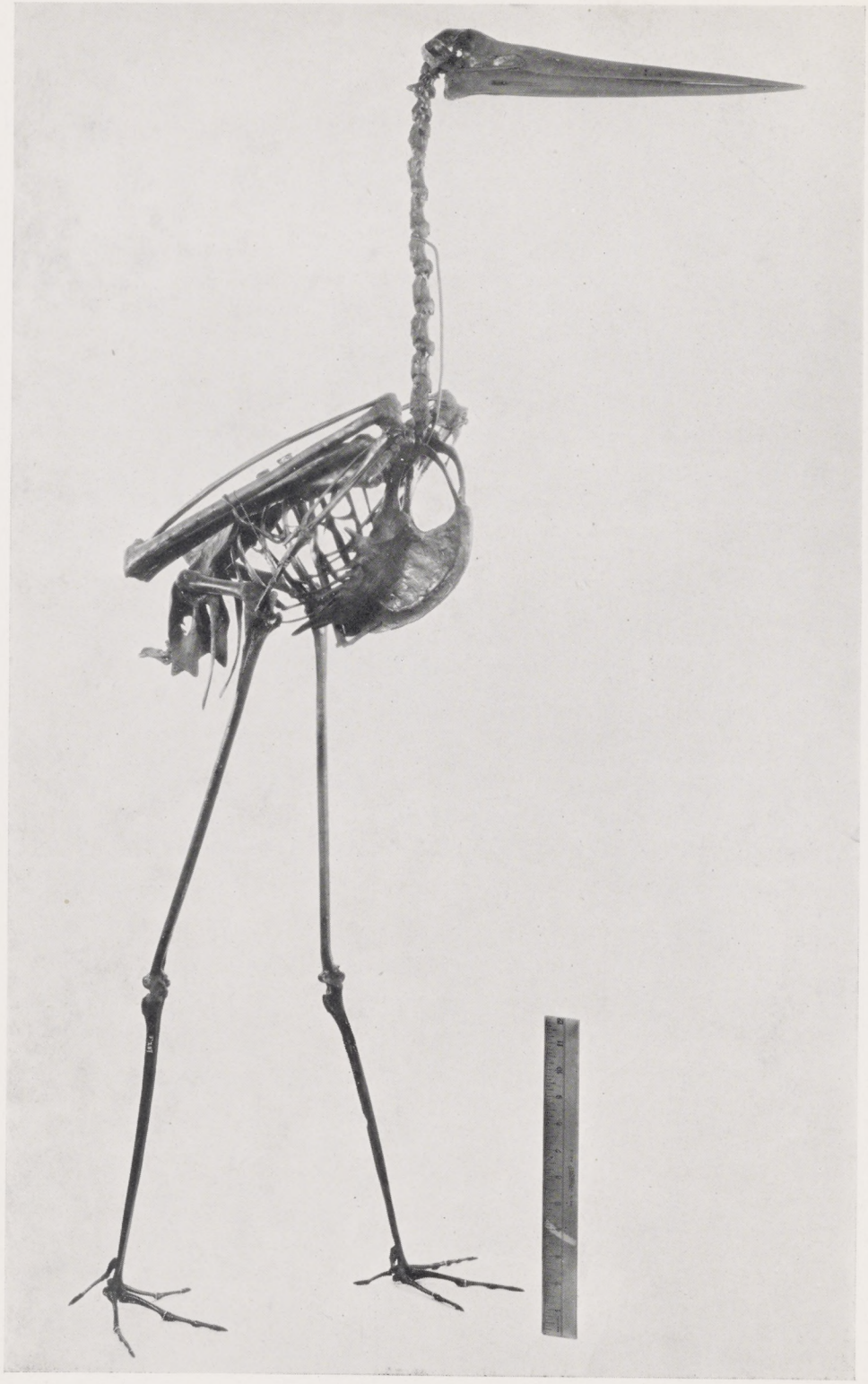
A RIVER SCENE by JAN VAN GOYEN

Oil on wood panel, 22″ wide x 14½″ high. Signature on boat: "Vn Goyen 1640". Lent by the Anita M. Baldwin Estate.

rivers, especially of Dortrecht, Rhenen, Arnhem, Nymwegen, Emmerich, and Kleve, show that he repeatedly traveled up and down these streams, never tarrying for long at any one place. Northward, he traveled to Haarlem, Amsterdam, Alkmaar, and Egmond.

Guild records and legal records give clues as to his whereabouts at different times. At Haarlem, on Sept. 5, 1634, he had to pay the fine of three florins for painting in the house of the art dealer, Isack van Ruisdael, when he had no right to do so. It is recorded that he was in Leyden with his wife in 1619, and he is mentioned again in the years 1627-28, 1631-32, and 1638. We know that Jan Steen was among his pupils and married his daughter, Margaret. Van Goyen presumably moved to The Hague in 1631 and the records show that he took up his citizenship there in 1634. C. Hofstede de Groot says, "After that he lived at The Hague and occupied himself not only with painting but also with dealing in works of art; moreover, he speculated in houses and in tulips and suffered great losses so that in spite of his incredible industry as a painter and draughtsman, he died insolvent."

LOUISE BALLARD



LA BREA STORK (*Ciconia maltha* Miller)
Skeleton mounted by Eugene J. Fischer

RANCHO LA BREA BIRDS

It may be surprising to many to realize that there were well over a hundred species of birds represented in the Ice Age deposits at Rancho La Brea and that the Museum has approximately 100,000 bird bones in its collections from that locality. The asphalt pits have so long been associated with the Saber-tooth Cat, the Giant Ground Sloth and other awesome large mammals, that the less spectactular avian population has assumed a subordinate position in popular knowledge.

As a matter of fact, in point of variety the birds from the tar pits actually surpass the mammals, which total less than fifty species. The avian group is represented by eighteen species which are now extinct and ninety-two others whose descendants are living today. Among the latter are seven of the heron and ibis group, several ducks, geese and shorebirds, two species of cranes, a quail, dove, pigeon, roadrunner, raven and crow, and a number of different kinds of woodpeckers and song birds. In greatest abundance, however, are the raptorial birds—the birds attracted to the pits to prey on other animals already entrapped.

It is in this predatory group, also, that the most extinct forms occur. Included here are seven eagles, only two of which are known today, two condors (California Condor and an extinct species) and the great *Teratornis* with wingspread of some twelve or thirteen feet. Among the smaller raptores represented are three vultures (including the Turkey Vulture), several owls (one extinct), hawks and falcons, and an extinct caracara—a member of the falcon family.

Five other fossil avian species are found among the specimens from Rancho La Brea—a turkey, stork, wood ibis, pigmy goose and blackbird. To these may be added the rare occurrence of the more recently extinct Passenger Pigeon.

Studies of the birds have been carried on since the earliest excavations at Rancho La Brea, and the publications are almost as numerous as those on the mammalian forms. However, the small size of the bird bones and their fragility has made difficult the assembling of complete skeletons in mounts for display. Until recently only the largest of the birds, *Teratornis,* has been mounted and this only with the support of a plaster backing. Others have been represented in the exhibit cases by the principal skeletal elements only, with no attempt to reconstruct a full skeleton.

As more of the bird material has been gone over, however, small parts have come to light, which had previously escaped notice in the first studies of the important diagnostic elements. We are, therefore, now assembling and mounting the skeletons of certain of the better-represented interesting species. To be sure, a certain amount of restoration of broken or missing bones will be necessary, for in no case is it possible to find a complete set of perfect bones of corresponding size. Such restoration, however, is being based upon careful scientific study and the completed mounts can be relied upon to present all of the essential characters of the various species.

The birds which have been selected for mounting include twelve of the extinct forms and, in addition, three or four of the species whose representatives are still living today.

The La Brea Stork, the first of the mounts to be completed, stands one-half inch over four feet in height, surpassing by more than a foot its closest living relative, the common European White Stork. The living Jabiru of South America attains a similar height but its heavy bones and massive up-turned beak are in striking contrast to the slim fossil with slender legs and thin, nearly straight beak.

The California Turkey, *Parapavo,* is mounted in a walking position with head slightly cocked as though looking for food. This bird was somewhat smaller than the living wild turkey of the mid-western states and the spur of the male bird showed greater length and symmetry. In many ways the bones are more suggestive of the Ocellated Turkey of Central America. *Parapavo* was evidently a resident of the Rancho La Brea region for we find numerous bones of very young chicks as well as the adult birds. An estimate of the number of individual turkeys represented in the pits excavated by the Museum gives a count of over five hundred, of which at least 150 were young.

LA BREA CARACARA (*Polyborus prelutosus* Howard)
Skeleton mounted by Eugene J. Fischer.

The life-like mount of the La Brea Caracara shows this bird with wings slightly raised, neck drooping and head extended, in the lazy loping posture often assumed by caracaras today. Though the La Brea bird was undoubtedly of a different species than the caracaras now living in southern United States and South America, its behavior need not have been strikingly different. To the paleontologist this bird is of more than average interest. Its bones are extremely variable in character, displaying similarities to both of the living species, and even greater likeness to the species which became extinct on Guadalupe Island less than a century ago. The combining of characters of the three Recent species in the La Brea bird suggests the possibility that the Pleistocene form may have been directly ancestral to the later types.

Teratornis, too, is to be represented in the new series, with a mount showing full extent of the wings. This bird was somewhat Condor-like in its skeletal structure, though the body was more massive and the beak considerably deeper and sharper. The skeleton will be displayed against a background silhouette of the bird in full feather to give a better appreciation of its size. This purely theoretical restoration of the plumage is based upon studies of living condors, vultures and eagles, and indicates greater length of wing in *Teratornis* than in any living form.

One of the extinct eagles, treated in similar manner, will appear in connection with the *Teratornis* mount for comparison of size. Three other prehistoric eagles, a vulture and the La Brea Condor, *Breagyps,* will be included in the series, presenting an interesting variety of raptorial types. One of the eagles, for example, is of particularly large size, with unusually long legs; the vulture to be shown is remarkably close in relationship to the Egyptian Vulture, a type not represented in the living American avifauna.

A few of the birds selected for display are of small size and are quite rare so that complete mounts will be impossible. With these the few available bones will be mounted flat against a silhouette representing a conception of the bird's appearance in life. Among the birds to be displayed in this manner are the Pigmy Goose, a little fellow about the size of a Mallard Duck, and the Brea Owl.

Though it will be some time before the skeletons will all be in readiness, it is planned to exhibit a few of the more outstanding mounts singly as they are completed. When the full series is prepared, however, it will be a featured part of the Hancock Hall exhibit, representing a collection of Pleistocene avian fossils unlike anything to be found in any other museum.

HILDEGARDE HOWARD

SCHEDULE OF EXHIBITIONS

HISTORY SECTION

James A. Keeney Memorial Collection of Oceania.....indefinitely

SCIENCE SECTION

The Museum Horse Show—"Ascent of Equus".....indefinitely

ART SECTION

Fine Arts

". . . And Now We Plan".....to January 18

Camera Pictorialists, 25th Annual Salon.....January 1 - 31

Pierre Ganine, sculpture.....January 1 - 31

California Water Color Society, 21st Annual.....January 30 - March 8

The Ideal Community.....February 1 - 28

Dan Lutz, paintings.....February 1 - 28

James Patrick, paintings.....March 1 - 31

Artists of Los Angeles and Vicinity, 3rd Annual.....March 13 - April 26

Decorative Arts

Chinese Furniture, 16-17th centuries

Lent by Mr. and Mrs. John F. Kullgren.....indefinitely

American Silver, 17-18th centuries

Marble Collection, Garvan Collection, Museum Collections.....indefinitely

American Furniture, 17-18th centuries

Museum Collections, with additions by special loan.....indefinitely

English Silver, 17-18th centuries

Museum Collections.....indefinitely

EDUCATION SECTION

"Wild Life of Los Angeles County".....indefinitely

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